

Is the Pen Mightier than the Plow?

By Congressman Jerry Moran
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"Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from a corn field." President Eisenhower's words are a fitting reminder as Congress works to draft a farm bill that will have lasting effects on the livelihoods of the farmers and rural communities I represent. As the farm bill debate takes shape in Washington, D.C., farmers across the country are working from dawn until dusk, harvesting the wheat that will soon be a loaf of bread on a table in New York or San Francisco.

The farm bill is a complex legislative package that funds everything from conservation practices to school lunches. In fact, the lion's share of the new bill, about 66 percent, would go to food stamps for Americans in need. The last farm bill, drafted in 2002, put into place a safety net to support farmers when growing conditions or markets fail. Critics of the policy claim that too much money is being spent to support farmers. Yet these critics fail to mention that the bill has come in approximately \$25 billion *under* budget since it was enacted five years ago. This leaves the Agriculture Committee with 42 percent less funds to write the next commodity title.

Another fact omitted by critics of farm policy is that American farmers are supported at much lower levels than other countries around the world. In 2005, American farmers received around \$44 per acre, compared to European farmers at \$390 per acre and Japan at a whopping \$4,442. Couple the low support level with the foreign regulations and tariffs that are also

imposed on U.S. commodities abroad, and it is easy to see why it is difficult for American farmers to compete in world markets.

The benefits of the farm bill are evident in the price Americans pay at the grocery store - be it in Kensington, Maryland, or Kensington, Kansas. In 2004, the average American spent about 7.9 percent of their budget on food, whereas Germany came in at 15.9 percent, Japan at 17.6 percent and India at 46.1 percent. In addition to food and fiber, American farmers are also now being called on to help meet our country's energy needs. Farmers are doing what they can to decrease our reliance on foreign sources of fuel. While striving for foreign energy independence, we should not simultaneously act to increase our foreign sources of food by stripping away this vital safety net.

In few other professions is one's very livelihood at the mercy of Mother Nature. Be it snow, freezes, floods, fire, tornadoes or drought - our farmers face serious obstacles in their quest to meet the everyday challenge of not only feeding and clothing their own families, but also feeding and clothing the families of millions around the world.

As farmers in Kansas harvest their wheat and begin to prepare for the next crop, we in our nation's capital are planting the seeds for the next generation of American farmers and working to provide stability to a risky profession so integral to our country. I can only hope that the farm bill we debate today does not simply write off the very future of American agriculture. I will continue to advocate for agriculture policy that uses taxpayer dollars responsibly, is more free market oriented and less trade distorting, allows producers to earn a reasonable living and helps to preserve the rural communities that we in Kansas call home.